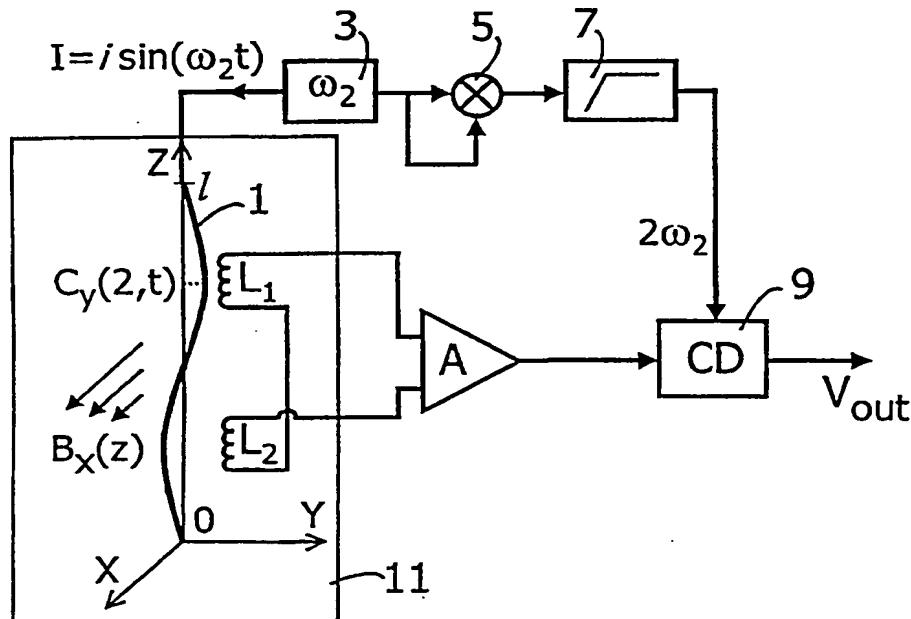




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(54) Title: MEASUREMENT OF MAGNETIC FIELDS USING A STRING FIXED AT BOTH ENDS



(57) Abstract

A method and apparatus for detecting magnetic fields in which a string (1) carries an alternating current. The displacement of the string from its unperturbed position due to a magnetic gradient across the string is detected by pick-up coils (L₁, L₂). The signals from the pick-up coils are demodulated using a signal derived from the alternating current to produce an output.

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MEASUREMENT OF MAGNETIC FIELDS USING A STRING FIXED AT BOTH ENDS

5 The present invention relates to the measurement of magnetic fields, particularly to the measurement of components of the magnetic gradient tensor, the measurement of which is known as magnetic gradiometry.

10 Accurate absolute measurements of the spatial derivatives of magnetic induction, i.e. the magnetic gradient tensor $B_{ij} = \partial B_i / \partial j$ ($ij = x, y, z$), taken at some local coordinate frame OXYZ are very important to progress in the fields of geological prospecting, sea and underwater navigation and exploration, terrestrial 15 and marine archaeology and medicine (magnetocardiography and magnetoencephalography). One reason for this importance in relation to geology and archaeology is that the Earth's magnetic field is approximately uniform in most regions of interest, so that magnetic gradient 20 measurements are unaffected by the Earth's magnetic field.

There do not currently exist any devices which are capable of directly measuring magnetic gradients. One known indirect method uses two or more spaced 25 magnetometers to take readings of the magnetic induction. The measurements from the magnetometers are differenced and divided by the spacing at which the readings were taken, to give an approximation of the magnetic gradient. The magnetometers are usually spaced 30 by around 50cm, which leads to a relatively large apparatus. In addition, two magnetometers are required for each direction along which the gradient is to be measured, which increases the cost of the apparatus.

Magnetic flux gradiometers exist which utilise 35 SQUIDs (Superconducting Quantum Interference Devices), but these require cryogenic temperatures and finely balanced superconducting pick-up coils, which limit

their practical usefulness and accuracy.

The present invention utilises a novel sensitive element in the form of a current-carrying string and suitable sensors to detect magnetic fields, in particular magnetic gradients.

Thus, viewed from a first aspect the invention provides apparatus for the measurement of magnetic fields comprising:

a string fixed at both ends, held under tension and arranged to carry a current;

and sensing means arranged to detect the transverse displacement of said string from an unperturbed position, due to a magnetic field acting on said string.

By "string" no particular limitation as to material or construction is intended. Any elongate element is included which is capable of carrying a current, of being transversely deflected by a magnetic field and of providing a restoring force.

Viewed from a further aspect, the invention provides a method of measuring magnetic fields comprising:

providing a string fixed at both ends, held under tension and carrying a current; and

detecting the transverse displacement of said string from an unperturbed position, due to a magnetic field acting on said string.

An unperturbated flexible string with fixed ends forms an absolute line in space going through the points where the ends of the string are fixed. This line can be arbitrarily selected as one of the axes of a local cartesian coordinate frame, say Z, with the other two axes, X and Y, chosen to lie in the plane transverse to the direction of the string. Any string deflection from this line is caused by absolute values of the transverse components of the force per unit length which acts on each unit element of the string. The force per unit length is due to the ambient gravitational field and,

- 3 -

when the string carries a current, to the ambient magnetic field.

The displacement $y(z, t)$ of a string of length l from its unperturbed position, for example, in the y -direction of the above local coordinate frame as a function of the z -position of a unit element and time can be described by the following differential equation

$$\begin{aligned}
 10 \quad \eta \frac{\partial^2}{\partial t^2} y(z, t) + h \frac{\partial}{\partial t} y(z, t) - YA \frac{\Delta l}{l} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial z^2} y(z, t) \\
 = - \eta g_y(0, t) - \eta \Gamma_{yz}(0, t) z \\
 + I(t) B_x(0, t) + I(t) B_{xz}(0, t) z \\
 + \text{noise}
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

15 with boundary conditions corresponding to the fixed ends of the string, i.e. $y(0, t) = y(l, t) = 0$. In this equation η denotes the string's mass per unit length, h is the friction coefficient per unit length, the parameters Y , A and $\Delta l/l$ are the string's Young modulus, 20 the area of its cross-section and the string's strain respectively. The quantities $g_y(0, t)$ and $\Gamma_{yz}(0, t)$ are the absolute values of the y -component of the total acceleration and the corresponding gravity gradient tensor component along the string, both taken at the 25 centre of the local coordinate frame chosen.

The quantity $I(t)$ is the current flowing through the string. It is well known that a conductor carrying a current $I(t)$ in a non-uniform magnetic field of flux density $\mathbf{B}(x, y, z)$ is subject to force $\mathbf{F} = I(t) \{ \mathbf{n} \times \mathbf{B}(x, y, z) \}$, where \mathbf{n} is the unit vector in the direction of current flow, in this case the Z direction. The 30 quantities $B_x(0, t)$ and $B_{xz}(0, t)$ therefore represent the absolute values of the x -component of the magnetic induction and the corresponding magnetic gradient tensor component along the string, both taken at the centre of 35 the local coordinate frame chosen.

In this example, the y -direction has been chosen as

- 4 -

an arbitrary example to simplify the explanation of the invention. However, the foregoing and following analysis is equally applicable to any direction transverse to the string or any number of directions.

5 Applying Fourier analysis to the complex shape of the string caused by its interaction with the magnetic and gravitational fields, the function $y(z, t)$, can be described, in the range $z=0$ to $z=1$, by an infinite sum of sinusoidal functions of period $2l$, with appropriate
10 coefficients $c_y(n, t)$. Thus, a solution of Equation(1), which satisfies the boundary conditions shown above, can be represented by the following infinite sum wherein each term in n corresponds to one of the string's natural vibrational modes

15

$$y(z, t) = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} c_y(n, t) \sin\left(\frac{\pi n}{l} z\right) \quad (2)$$

By substituting Equation (2) into Equation (1) and by multiplying both sides by $\sin(\pi n' z/l)$, and then by
20 integrating both sides over z from 0 to 1, one can obtain the differential equation for $c_y(n, t)$

$$\begin{aligned} 25 \quad & \frac{d^2}{dt^2} c_y(n, t) + \frac{2}{\tau} \frac{d}{dt} c_y(n, t) + \omega_n^2 c_y(n, t) = \\ & \frac{2}{\pi n} [(-1)^n - 1] \left[g_y(0, t) + \frac{1}{n} I(t) B_x(0, t) \right] \\ & + (-1)^n \frac{2l}{\pi n} \left[\Gamma_{yz}(0, t) + \frac{1}{n} I(t) B_{xz}(0, t) \right] \\ & \quad + \text{noise} \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

30 where the quantities

$$\omega_n = \frac{\pi n}{l} \sqrt{\frac{Y}{\rho} \frac{\Delta l}{l}} \quad (4)$$

35

represent the string's natural frequencies, and τ and ρ are the relaxation time and the volume mass density of

the string respectively. Thus, when $n=1$, ω_n represents the fundamental resonant frequency of the string.

The displacement of the string from its unperturbated position may be measured in the y (and or 5 x) direction by one or more suitable sensors positioned along the length of the string. The deviation of the string from a straight line may be approximated in terms of a finite Fourier sum of the string's natural modes. For example, the deviation of the string from its 10 unperturbated position may be recorded by an optical sensor or the like and analysed. According to one possibility, an image of the string in its deviated position may be recorded by a camera.

Alternatively, electrically inductive sensors may 15 be used to detect the displacement of parts of the string. From this analysis, values for $c_y(n, t_0)$ may be calculated for a given time t_0 , and in turn the values of any of $g_y(0, t_0)$, $\Gamma_{yz}(0, t_0)$, $B_x(0, t_0)$ and/or $B_{xz}(0, t_0)$ may be calculated. In this way, magnetic induction and 20 magnetic gradient may be measured using the string.

However, when n takes an even value, i.e. for those terms of the infinite sum in Equation (2) corresponding to vibrational modes of the string having a node at $z=1/2$ (anti-symmetric modes), the term involving $g_y(0, t)$ 25 and $B_x(0, t)$ is equal to zero. When n is even therefore, c_y is dependent only on $\Gamma_{yz}(0, t)$ and $B_{xz}(0, t)$ (and thermal noise).

Thus, by measuring only the amplitudes of 30 antisymmetric modes in the Fourier sum, values for $\Gamma_{yz}(0, t_0)$ and $B_{xz}(0, t_0)$ may be calculated.

The sensing means may therefore comprise at least two sensors located symmetrically about the midpoint of the string. In this way, the sensors may be arranged to detect the amplitude of the anti-symmetric natural modes 35 of the string in its deflected position, for example by differencing the output from each sensor. In a preferred arrangement, the sensors are located at

- 6 -

positions corresponding to the antinodes of at least one anti-symmetric natural mode of the string, for example $n=2$, where the displacement of the string will be at a maximum.

5 The current through the string may be an alternating current. In this case, according to Equation (1) the string will undergo forced oscillations generated by the force due to the alternating current in the magnetic field. The terms in B_x and B_{xz} in Equation 10 (1) will vary over time with the current $I(t)$, whereas the terms in g_y and Γ_{yz} will remain constant for a quasi-static gravitational field. This variation may be used to distinguish displacement of the string due to the magnetic field from that due to the gravitational field, 15 and thereby quantify the magnetic field.

Advantageously, the frequency of the alternating current may be selected to cause the string to resonate in one or more of its natural modes. In this case, the amplitude of the oscillation may be measured and will be 20 equal to $c_y(n, t)$ if the string is resonating in the n th mode. As explained above, from the values of $c_y(n, t)$ the values of any of $g_y(0, t_0)$, $\Gamma_{yz}(0, t_0)$, $B_x(0, t_0)$ and/or $B_{xz}(0, t_0)$ may be calculated.

25 In a particularly advantageous arrangement, the frequency of the alternating current may be substantially equal to the frequency of one of the anti-symmetric natural modes of the string, i.e. the frequency of the alternating current may be an even multiple (n) of the fundamental frequency of the string.

30 For example, if the current through the string $I(t)$ is selected to satisfy $I(t)=i \sin(\omega_n t)$, where ω_n is the frequency of the n th natural mode of the string (where n is even), the string will undergo forced oscillations which will lead to resonance of the string. At 35 resonance, when damping is completely counteracted by the pumping force of the alternating current, the amplitude of the oscillations will be given by the

following expression

$$c_y(n, t) = -\frac{1}{n} \frac{\tau}{\omega_n} \frac{i}{\eta} \frac{l}{\pi} B_{xz} \cos(\omega_n t) \quad (5)$$

5 Thus, the string resonates in the nth natural mode and according to Equation (5) the amplitude of the resonant oscillations is directly proportional to the magnetic gradient B_{xz} , and can therefore be used to measure this quantity. For example, sensors located at 10 the antinodes of this mode, i.e. symmetrically about the midpoint of the string, may be used to measure the amplitude directly.

15 In a preferred embodiment, the frequency of the alternating current is twice the fundamental frequency of the string, i.e. $n=2$.

20 The string's deflection from its unperturbed position may be detected by any suitable displacement sensing device. When the string carries an alternating current, the sensing means may detect the displacement 25 of the string by electromagnetic induction. The amplitude of the current induced in a conductor adjacent the string will be a direct function of the distance of the string from that conductor. Thus, in a preferred embodiment of the invention one or more fixed pick-up coils are arranged along the length of the string to act 30 as displacement sensing means, the current induced in each coil being directly related to the string's displacement from its unperturbed position.

35 In a particularly advantageous embodiment, displacement sensors, for example pick-up coils, are arranged adjacent the string in two non-parallel, preferably orthogonal, planes, so as to be capable of measuring the string's displacement in two transverse directions simultaneously.

Advantageously, the alternating current may be used 35 to demodulate the signals from the displacement sensors. For example, when the frequency of the alternating

current is an even multiple of the fundamental frequency of the string, the frequency of the signal generated in an electromagnetic pick-up element, for example a coil, adjacent the resonating string is a multiple of the 5 signal due to the alternating current through the string in its unperturbated position, say $\sin(\omega_n t)$, with the signal due to the physical oscillation of the string, say $-\cos(\omega_n t)$, which is the integral of the alternating current function. This multiplication results in a 10 signal from the sensors of frequency $2\omega_n$. A demodulating reference signal of frequency $2\omega_n$ can be generated from the alternating current to synchronously detect the sensor signals. Because both signals are generated from the same source, it is ensured that the frequency 15 relationship is constant.

The voltage excited in the pick-up coils due to electromagnetic induction, is given by the following expression

$$V_e = G \times B_{xz} \times \cos(2\omega_n t) \quad (6)$$

20 where G is the gain in the primary inductive transducer, for example a pair of pick-up coils. The value of G is defined by the geometrical configuration of the pick-up coils and is proportional to the current through the 25 string.

In a preferred embodiment, the string and preferably also the sensing means is cooled to reduce the effect of thermal noise on the measurements. For example the apparatus may be immersed in a bath of 30 liquid nitrogen or other suitable coolant.

The apparatus may comprise more than one string, for example three, four, five or more strings. The strings may be arranged at arbitrary angles to each other in order to measure simultaneously all the 35 independent elements of the magnetic gradient tensor.

Some embodiments of the invention will now be described by way of example only and with reference to

the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a general schematic representation of a preferred embodiment of the invention;

Figure 2 represents an experiment carried out using 5 the embodiment of Figure 1, and

Figure 3 shows experimental results achieved with a second embodiment of the invention.

A single channel prototype of a device according to the invention is shown in Figure 1. The device 10 comprises a flexible string 1. The string has, in this embodiment, a length $l = 26$ cm, is 0.25 mm in diameter and is fixed at its ends in a ceramic housing. The string is preferably formed of a wire of low mass-per-unit length and relatively high tensile strength. In 15 the example shown, the string is formed of composite zinc clad silver wire with a mass-per-unit length of 0.44×10^{-3} kgm⁻¹ and a tensile strength of 130,000 psi (900 MNm⁻²).

The conductive string is oriented vertically and 20 two pick-up coils L1 and L2 are connected in series and directly coupled to a low noise amplifier A. The pick-up coils L1, L2 are connected in antiphase such that identical signals which are induced in each coil cancel out, whereas opposite signals are added together. This 25 configuration (when demodulation is carried out at a frequency of $2\omega_2$) excludes the influence of the uniform magnetic field generated by the current-carrying string 1 which forms an offset signal at the input of the amplifier A when the string 1 is unperturbated from its 30 straight line configuration. This increases the dynamic range of the magnetic gradiometer. It should be noted that the uniform magnetic field produced by the alternating current of frequency ω_2 through the string 1 is also variable with the frequency ω_2 and for this 35 reason is cut off by demodulation at a frequency of $2\omega_2$.

The string 1 is pumped with a sinusoidal current $I(t) = i \sin(\omega_2 t)$ from a signal generator 3. The same

- 10 -

current is used to form a reference signal at twice the pumping current frequency $2\omega_2$ by means of a multiplier 5 and a high-pass filter 7. The frequency ω_2 of the pumping current is twice the fundamental frequency of 5 the string. The reference signal and the output from the low-noise amplifier A are input to a synchronous detector 9. The output voltage V_{out} of the synchronous detector is directly proportional to a magnetic gradient B_{xz} around the string 1 and is the output of the device.

10 The string 1 and the pick-up coils L1, L2 are situated inside a cryogenic nitrogen bath 11 at 77K. This increases greatly the signal-to-noise ratio by minimising environmental thermal noise influence and Johnson noise inside the pick-up coils themselves, as 15 well as increasing the stability of the mechanical parameters of the string 1, in particular the stability of the amplitude of its forced resonant oscillations.

20 The prototype shown in Figure 1 was tested in laboratory conditions. The string was stretched inside a ceramic housing and a second resonant mode of 484 Hz was obtained. Two coreless pick-up coils of 350 turns each were used, coupled to a commercially available Stanford Research Lock-In amplifier having an input noise of approximately 6 nV per root Hz. The output 25 signal was detected at the doubled 484 Hz frequency (968 Hz) and the bandwidth was chosen to be 0.3 Hz.

30 A small magnet was moved beside the experimental set-up, and a clear magnetic gradient signal was observed. During the experiment the string was shaken and moved without the magnet present. The apparatus did not respond to this movement. However, a DC response to the position of the magnet was produced when the magnet was returned.

35 In another experiment represented schematically in Figure 2, the magnetic gradiometer prototype 13 of Figure 1 was placed onto a mobile frame and moved continuously along a 2 meter long track 15 over a

- 11 -

5 magnetic field source 17 (shown in the Figure 2 by a dark spot). The magnetic field source 17 generated a field of differential forces proportional to $B_x \times I_z$, represented schematically in Figure 2 by arrows 19. The approximate speed of the prototype was one centimetre per second. The typical sensor response was recorded from the screen of an oscilloscope and is shown in Figure 2 as a plot of the output voltage V_{out} against time t .

10 Thus, the experiments have clearly shown a differential response of the string sensor typical to magnetic gradiometry. By using a commercial HT_c superconducting quantum interference device (SQUID) instead of the low-noise amplifier A, the sensitivity to 15 magnetic gradients would increase to a level so high that it would be easy to detect, for example, treasure-bearing remains of a submarine or of a ship from a reasonable distance.

20 Another embodiment of the invention, according to which a very high sensitivity to magnetic gradients can be achieved without using SQUIDs, has been tested experimentally.

25 In this second embodiment, the string 1 is pumped with an additional carrier-frequency current and inductively coupled to a resonant bridge comprising two 30 pick-up coils connected in a gradiometric configuration in parallel with a capacitance and tuned to the carrier frequency. This frequency is chosen to be far removed from the string's effective mechanical bandwidth which is normally limited to a few kHz even for very stiff strings. In this case, mechanical displacements of the string give a low-frequency modulation (at the rate of the second natural mode of the string) of the carrier-frequency voltage across the bridge.

35 The string and the resonant bridge are cooled to 77 K to reduce the effect of thermal noise on measurements.

A double-lock-in scheme provides, firstly

- 12 -

amplification and detection of the carrier signal and, secondly, amplification and detection of the low-frequency envelope with an amplitude proportional to the measured magnetic gradient.

5 The prototype measuring system according to the invention was tested in a gradient field and the results of the test are shown in Figure 3. The upper curve shows the magnetic gradient signal in the time domain. The amplitude of the magnetic gradient signal is
10 approximately 16 nT/m, the frequency of the signal is 0.3 Hz, and the scale of the screen is 10 seconds per division. The lower curve shows the spectrum of the magnetic gradiometer output signal. The signal frequency is marked by the cursor. The scale is 0.2 Hz
15 per horizontal division and 10.0 dBm per vertical division. The estimate of the signal to noise ratio gives a sensitivity threshold of approximately 0.36 nT/m per root Hz, for this particular sensor configuration. The observed noise is not instrumental but reflects the
20 magnetic environment around the experimental set-up.

- 13 -

Claims

1. Apparatus for the measurement of magnetic fields comprising:

5 a string fixed at both ends, held under tension and arranged to carry a current;

and sensing means arranged to detect the transverse displacement of said string from an unperturbated position, due to a magnetic field acting on said string.

10

2. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said sensing means comprises at least two sensors symmetrically longitudinally positioned about the mid-point of said string.

15

3. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the string is arranged to carry an alternating current.

20

4. Apparatus as claimed in claim 3, wherein the frequency of the alternating current is substantially equal to the frequency of a natural anti-symmetric mode of said string.

25

5. Apparatus as claimed in claim 4, wherein the frequency of the alternating current is twice the fundamental frequency of the string.

30

6. Apparatus as claimed in any of claims 3 to 5, wherein the sensing means is arranged to generate a detection signal due to the transverse displacement of the string and the apparatus further comprises demodulating means arranged to demodulate the detection signal with a demodulation signal, the demodulation signal having a frequency twice that of the alternating current.

35

- 14 -

7. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein said sensing means comprises at least one pick-up coil arranged such that, in use, a current is induced in the coil by the current passing through the string.

5

8. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein said sensing means comprises means for detecting the transverse displacement of said string in two non-parallel planes.

10

9. A method of measuring magnetic fields comprising:
providing a string fixed at both ends, held under tension and carrying a current; and
detecting the transverse displacement of said string from an unperturbed position, due to a magnetic field acting on said string.

15 10. A method as claimed in claim 9, wherein the string carries an alternating current.

20

11. A method as claimed in claim 10, wherein the frequency of the alternating current is substantially equal to the frequency of a natural anti-symmetric mode of said string.

25

12. A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the frequency of the alternating current is twice the fundamental frequency of the string.

30

13. A method as claimed in any of claims 10 to 12, wherein the step of detecting the transverse displacement of the string includes demodulating a signal due to the displacement of the string with a demodulating frequency which is twice the frequency of the alternating current through the string.

35

- 15 -

14. A method as claimed in any of claims 9 to 13, wherein the displacement of the string is detected electromagnetically.

5 15. A method as claimed in any of claims 9 to 14, wherein the displacement of the string is detected in two non-parallel planes.

1/3

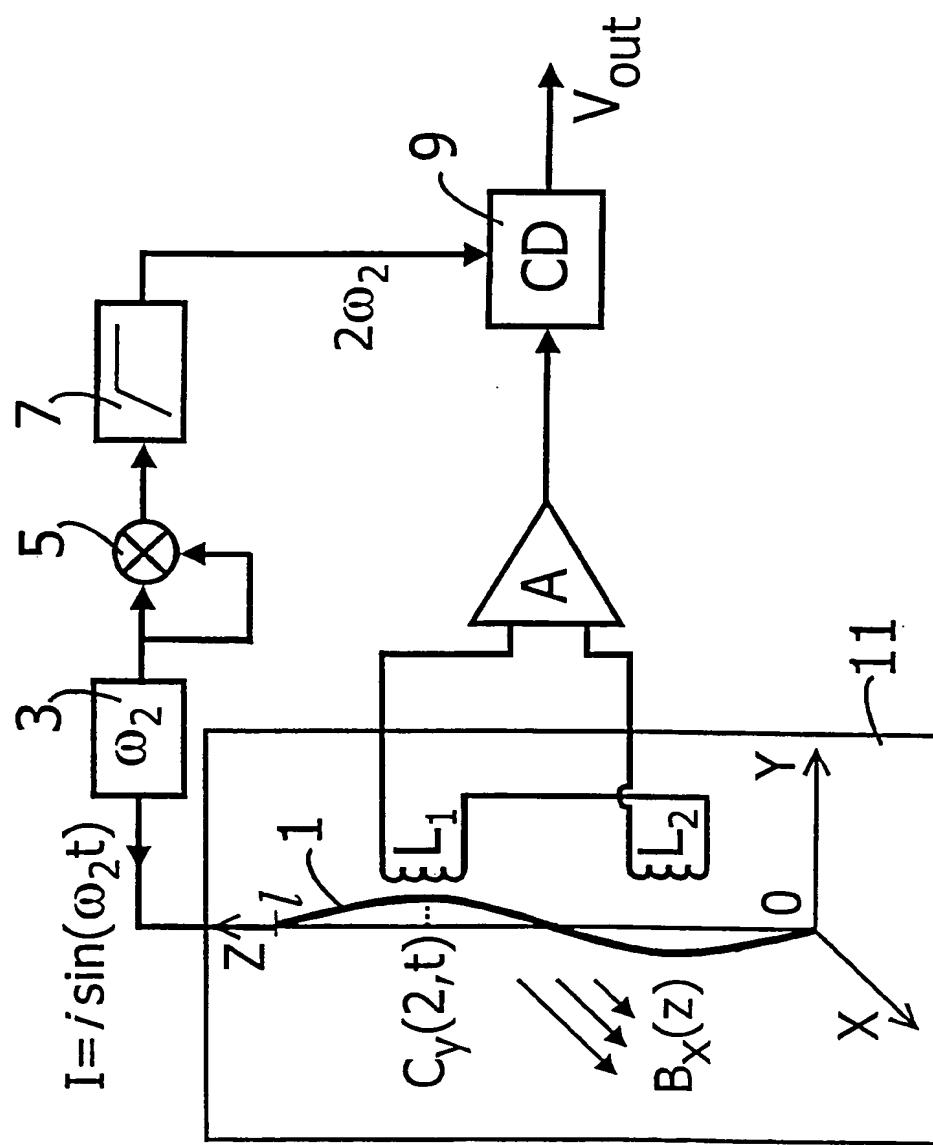


Fig. 1

2/3

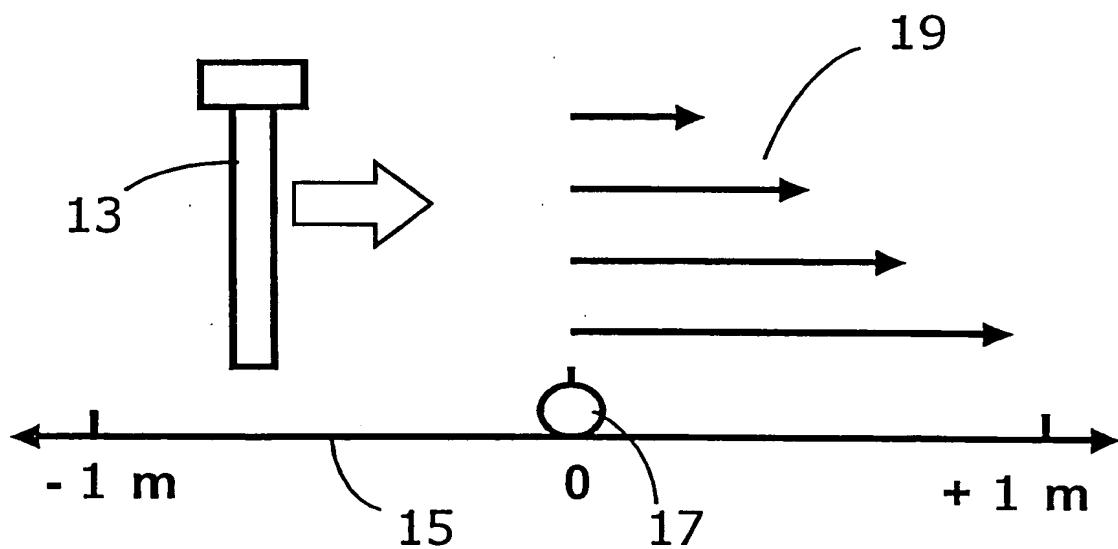
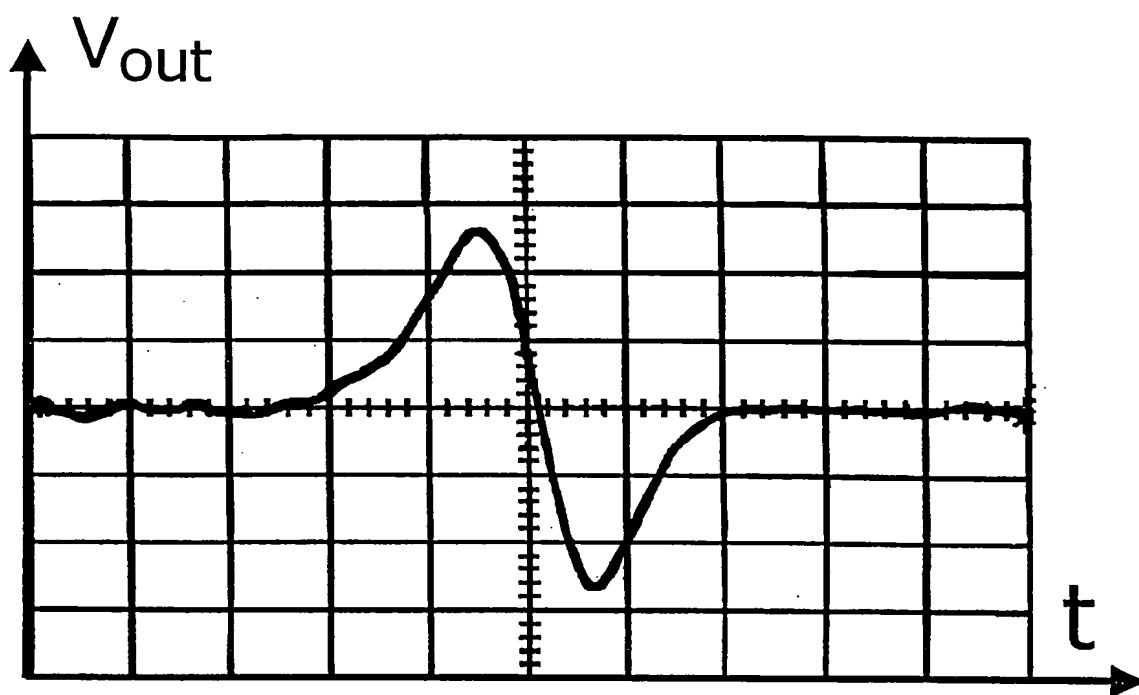


Fig. 2

3/3

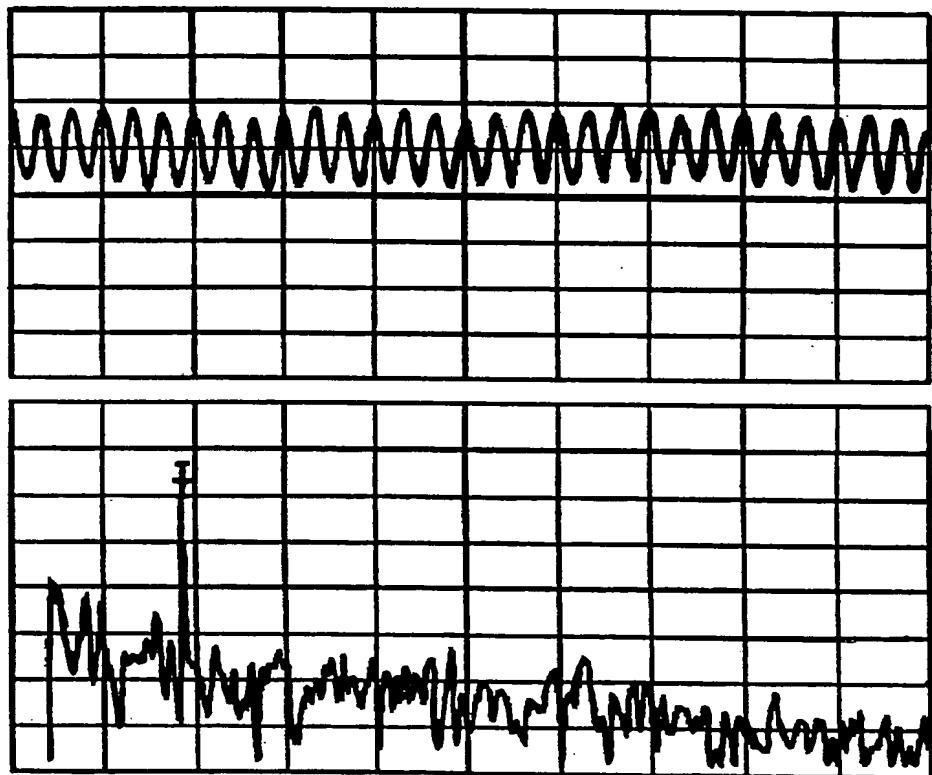


Fig. 3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Int'l Application No

PCT/EP 00/04270

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 G01R33/028 G01R33/022

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 G01R

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

WPI Data, EPO-Internal, PAJ, INSPEC

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	GB 1 038 776 A (STANDARD TELEPHONES AND CABLES LTD) 10 August 1966 (1966-08-10) Claims 1,2,7 ---	1,8,9,15
X	DE 952 369 C (VEB CARL ZEISS JENA) 17 May 1956 (1956-05-17) Claim 1 ---	1,9
X	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 017, no. 302 (P-1553), 10 June 1993 (1993-06-10) -& JP 05 026990 A (MITSUBISHI HEAVY IND LTD), 5 February 1993 (1993-02-05) abstract --- -/-	1,9

Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Int'l. Application No

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